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ABSTRACT

Romance novels have become increasingly popular and sexually explicit, in part because women may gain a sense of self through reading them and perhaps in reaction to the patriarchal structure of society. Women may seek escape and a sense of self-identity through the novels' "larger-than-life" characters and predictable endings. Readers of romance novels take pleasure in the heroine as the embodiment of traits they are unable to project in their own patriarchal surroundings. Reading a romance novel typically progresses in three stages: separation, identification, and assimilation. Separation represents the reader's interpretation of the character traits of the hero and heroine in terms of the separate animus and anima figures (male and female, respectively). The heroine represents the ideal woman who functions as the feminine model awaiting her animus complement. Attraction to the hero is the projection of the heroine's animus spirit. The next stage in the illustration of the relationship of hero and heroine is identification, typically involving misunderstandings, sexual harassment, transformation of the hero, and a happy ending. The final stage in the pursuit of self is the assimilation stage in which the accomplished merger of animus to feminine function signifies the final and full realization of self. The hero is always brutal and uncaring at the outset, but is transformed into a caring individual through assimilation with the anima spirit of the heroine. Romance novels succeed because they satisfy the unconscious need of animus projection and permit a recognition of real self. (SRT)

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FUNCTION OF HERO AND HEROINE IN WOMEN'S FORMULA FICTION: A GAINING OF SELF THROUGH SEPARATION, IDENTIFICATION, AND ASSIMILATION

by

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ABSTRACT:

Utilizing Jung's unconscious archetype of animus/anima, this study proposes a psychoanalytic perspective toward understanding the appeal of the romance novel for today's woman. Acknowledging Janice Radway's seminal study and critiquing her conclusions of women's nurturance needs, this paper argues that the psychological fulfillment gained from the reading experience is the quest for a sense of self-identity. I suggest three stages in this journey toward "self:" "separation," recognition of the heroine as ideal woman and hero as animus figure; "identification," transformation of the hero/animus representing the merging of animus to feminine counterpart; "assimilation," final merging as ultimate finding of the "lost mother."

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FUNCTION OF HERO AND HEROINE IN WOMEN'S FORMULA FICTION: A GAINING OF SELF THROUGH SEPARATION, IDENTIFICATION, AND ASSIMILATION

Today's romance novel is the most purchased type of popular fiction in the current literary marketplace. In fact, the romance novel has enjoyed popularity throughout its development in modern literature--from its very beginnings as a genre, placed by many in the novels of Jane Austen and Emily Brontė.[1] (Lowery, 1983; Paris, 1978; Jensen, 1984; Keener, 1983; Pearson, 1981) Austen and Brontė's portrayal of self-possessed heroes and heroines, secure and in control of their feelings and actions and able to survive and triumph amid adverse forces, continues to be one of the distinguishing themes of the romance novel as it has developed into the "popular" art form of today. This is not to suggest that the novels of Austen, Brontė, and other seminal romance and gothic writers can be read in the same way as today's mass-produced, popular fiction, or that the women's formula fiction of today should be read as "great" art. Nevertheless, the theme of self-identity or self-love, initiated by such great novelists as Austen and given its varied treatment by writers throughout the history of women's fiction, has remained a consistent and important signature in the development of the romance novel genre. (Keener, 1983; Paris, 1978; Radway, 1984 b ;Jensen, 1984; Pearson, 1981)

Given that the theme of women's self-identity has remained a fundamental and consistent thread woven into the very narrative structure of the romance novel, understanding the recent explosion in the popularity of this popular fiction calls for a re-examination of this self-identity

code. We need to ask if the recent (within the last decade or so) romance novel "phenomenon" indicates a reworking of this code; in other words, does the representation of self-identity in today's romances "work" in a different way for today's reader of formula fiction.

In order to investigate how female self-identity is portrayed in the romance text and how the woman reader "constructs" her self-identity[2] from the reading of the text, I will examine the characteristics and qualities of the romance heroine and hero, arguing that the heroine not only possesses the independent and "spunky" qualities that today's women desire and enjoy vicariously through their reading, but that the seemingly initially harsh and uncaring traits of the hero (which, by the end of the novel become completely reversed) also have an important function in the creation of self-identity for the woman reader.

Using a psychological approach, I will incorporate the tenets of Jung as to the existence of contra-sexual tendencies present in all humans (anima in men and animus in women). Jungian critic Esther Harding (1937) details this conflict within the human psyche:

> For no individual is entirely male or entirely female. Each is made up of a composite of both elements, and these two constituents are not infrequently in constant conflict within the psyche...The [woman or man's] inner conflict will only be resolved when s/he has found a relation to both aspects of herself/himself and is reconciled with those ruling powers of the psyche, the masculine and feminine principles, which are inherent in the very nature of every individual.
>
> (p. 37)

We find that a woman reader can fulfill this "psychological merger" in her reading of the romance novel. The romance hero fulfills in the woman reader her animus principle. The romance novel's always happy ending represents the merging of the animus figure in the woman reader's identity struggle. Further, I shall argue that this merging of male and female images corresponds to the finding of the "lost mother." Today's romance reader, who finds herself self-consciously struggling in a patriarchal society and battling unequal treatment in her personal and work worlds, gains a more secure sense of self-identity through her reading of the romance novel and her identification with both the hero and heroine.

This paper then will offer a psychoanalytic approach toward understanding the appeal of the romance novel for today's woman. An introductory section notes the recent popularity surge in romance novels and justifies a psychoanalytic approach to understanding women's formula fiction texts. Acknowledging Janice Radway's seminal study Reading the Romance (1984 b) of romance novels and critiquing her conclusions that a woman reader finds pleasure in these texts because of the need for nurturance, the remaining three sections will describe what I suggest are three stages which make up the larger psychological fulfillment gained from the reading experience--the gaining of a stronger sense of self: "separation" represents the reader's interpretation of the character traits of the hero and heroine in terms of the separate animus and anima figures; "identification" describes the transformation of the hero/animus from harsh and uncaring to warm and nurturing which represents the merging of the animus to the

feminine counterpart; "assimilation" explains how the final merging becomes the ultimate finding of the "lost mother."

I

Statistics abound to demonstrate the current "explosion" of popularity of the romance novel. In 1983 alone, sales of the paperback romance soared to 250 million copies (Burack, 1983, p. vii), and this figure is increasing and expected to reach 500 million copies annually in the next few years. (Burack, 1983, p. vii). One-fourth to one-third of the 400 paperback titles published each month are original romance novels. (Radway, 1984 b, p. 44-45)

And who are the buyers and readers of these books? It is not surprising to find that the majority of romance readers fall into the 25 to 45-year-old age group. In fact, out of the entire book-reading public, adult females constitute well over half. (Radway, 1984 b, pp. 44-45) We note the obvious because this study will center on this large, heterogeneous group of readers--representing all kinds of economic, social,and occupational backgrounds and family situations--who hold in common an attraction to romance reading, and we will attempt an understanding of how these women gain a sense of self through their reading of romance novels.

Today's romance novels are quite diverse, from the shorter, easy-to-read Harlequins, to the longer, historical romances, to the most recent introduction, the blatantly erotic, almost pornographic romances.[3] These "erotic historical romances" or "bodice-rippers" were introduced

as innovations of the typical romance around 1970, and signaled the beginning of the surge in romance novel sales.[4] Books by Rosemary Rogers, Danielle Steele, Lolah Burford, and Kathleen Woodiwiss introduced explicit sexual scenes not found in earlier romances. (Falk,1983, p. 356; Mussell, 1981, pp. 10-11)

At this same time, another phenomenon in romance publishing emerged--the series romance. The romance novel publishers, recognizing this renewed interest in romance novels, introduced their respective series or "lines"--exemplified today by Harlequin, Silhouette, and their imitatiors. (Mussell, 1981, pp. 10-11) Further, publishers of Harlequin added to their initial "Harlequin Romance" series, the "Harlequin Presents" line, which contains more sexual explicitness. Ron Busch, president of Pocket Books, concurs that because the mid-70's signaled a major shift toward sexuality through the "bigger and better novels" of Steele, Rogers, and Woodiwiss, his company launched, in May 1980, the "Silhouette Romances" line, which has subsequently been followed by the "Silhouette Special Edition," "Silhouette Desire," and "First Love" lines. Busch notes that marketing research through direct marketing, newsletters, and writers' workshops demonstrated that many readers were no longer interested in gothic romances or the "conservative" romance novel with its unthreatening, "sexually-safe" undertones, and so, the publishing companies accommodated this interest by introducing separate "lines." (Falk,1983, pp. 159-360)

Both the increased popularity of the romance novel and the introduction of several romance lines typified by sexual explicitness establish the recent popularity surge in the romance novel, although I shall not attempt

in this study, to explain how these two events have interacted. Nevertheless, these trends do lead us to question why women are demanding a "sexual reworking" of the traditional romance novel genre. This shift toward overt sexuality is important to an understanding of the genre, and although this theme will be explored later in the paper, it is significant to note its appearance here because it suggests that a cause for the romance novel's increased popularity and shift toward sexuality grows out of our patriarchal society. And even though patriarchy has typified our social development throughout our history, the emphasis on women's equality of the last few decades and the recent romance novel phenomenon can both be noted as coinciding occurrences, even though their causal connections might be more difficult to establish. The woman who today finds herself in a society which grants "equality" but also demands the traditional role of mother and homemaker struggles to determine her self-identity. For the woman romance reader, one means for self-identity lies in her reading of the romance. Since many cultural studies and feminist critics have already provided in-depth analyses of our contemporary, patriarchal society, I am going to concur that we live in a capitalistic, patriarchal, and therefore chauvanistic society and that this engenders in today's woman a defensive, "need-to-escape" response--the particular response considered in this study being the attraction of the woman reader to the romance novel as a means toward gaining self-identity.

Having acknowledged patriarchy as a catalyst producing female insecurity or resistance in the form of romance novel reading, we can

now note some of the particular reasons critics offer for the appeal of romance novels. One reason for a woman to pick up and read a romance lies in the appeal of the reading experience itself. Regardless of how the characters and plot signify to the woman reader, the very pleasure of escaping into a text has to be acknowledged. This "reading time" is the woman's own time. It is under her control and is, in effect, a kind of resistance within her imposed social framework. (Radway, 1984 b) "When a woman is totally isolated from anyone who shares her perceptions, reading may provide the fictional community that keeps her sane." (Pearson, 1981, p. 257) Kay Mussell (1981), in Women's Gothic and Romantic Fiction, agrees that, "We should take into account the aesthetic nature of the reading experience itself." (Mussell, 1981, p. 106)

The importance of such a private, "safely-resistent" exercise is given a psychological importance by Harding (1933), in The Way of All Women. She discusses the need for many women to escape into fantasy:

> I have known many people [women] who have built up an elaborate phantasy island or castle to which they retire when life is dull or difficult. Here they often spend endless time and energy constructing in phantasy a world more to their liking than the humdrum one to which they find it so hard to adapt.
>
> (p. 43)

One inherent feature of the romance novel which illustrates and enhances this notion of escape is the fact that it is formula fiction. The romance novel shares with other formula books--such as mysteries, detective novels, James Bond, or Louis L'Amour books--a predictable

plot structure and characterizations. In fact, one feature of formula fiction which distinguishes it from "realistic" literature is its "larger than life" heroes and heroines and predictable happy plot reconciliation. The formula reader enjoys James Bond or a romance novel because s/he identifies with a character that lives and acts as s/he might fantasize and very importantly, because s/he knows James Bond or the heroine will succeed no matter what the obstacles. The basic trait, and attraction, of all formula books is their power to encourage in the reader a self-identity through larger-than-life characters and predictable endings.

Umberto Eco (1979 a) in The Role of the Reader explains how a "contemporary industrial society" would desire a literature of repose--of escape into literature and narrative which is predictable, "Narrative of a redundant nature would appear in this panorama as an indulgent invitation to repose, the only occasion of true relaxation offered to the consumer." (p. 121) John Cawalti (1976), in Adventure, Mystery, and Romance, agrees as to the power of formuliac literature as a reprieve from reality:

> As shaped by the imperatives of the experience of escape, these formuliac worlds are constructions that can be described as moral fantasies constituting an imaginary world in which the audience can encounter a maximum of excitement without being confronted with an overpowering sense of the insecurity and danger that accompany such forms of excitement in reality. Much of the artistry of formuliac literature involves the creator's ability to plunge us into a believable kind of excitement while, at the same time, confirming our confidence that in the formuliac world things always work out as we want them to.
>
> (p. 16)

We can even call romance formula fictions, as Mussell (1981) suggests, "psychosocial release valves" for frustrations and a "tranquilizer" that reconciles the...problematic in every life." (p. 147)

Given the fundamental needs of pleasure in the reading activity and the repose provided by formula texts, the cursory explanations offered by many critics should be noted to illustrate other attempts at explaining their appeal. Explanations for the current popularity of the romance novel (depending on the background and interest of the critic) range from needs for male domination to needs for cheap entertainment. Mussell (1981) summarizes those critics who view romance-reading as feminine defeat: "heroines give up spunk and character when they win/marry the hero who is still the voice of authority;" "stories are simple solutions to complex problems;" "matriarchal duties are stressed and measured by patriarchy;" "no adequate models of women are presented in this 'pop' art or in 'high' art;" "stories are unreal and unsatisfying because they all tell the same story." (p. 22) Mussell also quotes Helen Hazen, author of Endless Rapture, as expressing an attack frequently aimed at feminists, "[a woman] yearns to be dominated by a sexually potent man and this urge arises naturally from biological imperatives." (p. 22) Margaret Ann Jensen (1984), in her thorough study of Harlequins, Love's Sweet Return/The Harlequin Story, quotes Tania Modleski's reading of Harlequins, "romances stress 'the cost of revolt' for women and portray the heroines betraying themselves, subverting their emotions. This makes the process of reading romances a destructive act in the long run." (p. 24) Another common reading of romance novels is as pornography, and critics

use this perspective to treat romances with mild disapproval or total opposition. (Jensen, 1984, p. 25)

Opposing these negative, masochistic motives are two studies which attempt to explain the appeal through more positive reasoning and through recognition of our patriarchal society. Jensen (1984) supports this more sympathetic stance, "Women read formula fiction to meet their needs for cheap entertainment, sociability, easy education and predictable plots that allow one to be interrupted without losing track of the story." (p. 515) Jensen offers more explanations:

> Since women's relationships with men are a disturbing mixture of fear and attractions, love and hate, it is not surprising that these tensions surface in their literature. ...Harlequins build this tension and then relieve it with the fantasy that love will tame the brute...Readers are drawn to this emotionally powerful combination of reality and fantasy.
>
> (pp. 154-155)

Jensen's study is representative of a recent trend of culture theorists who, instead of dismissing romance novels as "depressing stories of female subjugation," look for more accurate, sympathetic explanations. Although many literary critics have claimed these texts reveal women are weak and need a man, Jensen very perceptively questions why women readers would be drawn to a literature which reinforces their impotent status, "If Harlequins are read as feminine defeats in which heroines abdicate responsibility for themselves to the nearest powerful male, extensive explanations are needed to tell us why so many women want to read about submission and defeat." (my emphasis) (Jensen, 1984, p. 151)

Radway (1984, b) also concludes that the woman reader views the stories as "a woman's triumph." Radway, in her recent investigations has also attempted a genuine explanation of the romance novel's influence. (Radway, 1984a;1984 b, p. 54). Radway's reader-response approach led her to survey a group of women readers, the Smithton Readers, and conclude that the power of the romance novel is its ability to fulfill the reader's need for nurturance which she is unable to realize in our patriarchal society:

> We will discover that it is the constant impulse and duty to mother others that is responsible for the sense of depletion that apparently sends some women to romance fiction. By immersing themselves in the romantic fantasy, women vicariously fulfill their needs for nurturance by identifying with a heroine whose principal accomplishment, if it can even be called that, is her success at drawing the hero's attention to herself, at establishing herself as the object of his concern and recipient of his care. Because the reader experiences that care vicariously, her need is assuaged only as long as she can displace it onto a fictional character.
>
> (1984 b, p. 84)

The diversity, even contradictions, between all the negative and positive explanations can point up the advantage of examining the texts using a psychoanalytic method. For, a psychoanalytic approach, which measures in all kinds of romance novels the consistencies in character and plot structure, can give us a fundamental explanation for the romance novel's basic appeal. A psychoanalytic approach looks to unconscious forces which are projected onto the text; in other words, the discursive level embodies, in character traits and narrative structure, the deeper, unconscious motivations.

Cawalti (1976) recognizes the capacity for formulas to fulfill unconscious, latent anxieties, "Formula stories may well be one important way in which the individuals in a culture act out unconscious or repressed needs, or express latent motives that they must give expression to but cannot face openly." (p. 26) Admitting underlying, psychological motivations of the formula reader supports the focus of this study. The psychoanalytic approach to understanding the romance novel text and its function for the reader will offer another perspective to understanding the romance novel "phenomenon." Given the range of explanations--from oversimplified, defeatist interpretations to the sincere attempts at understanding the power of the romance novel--it can be useful to seek another, <u>complementary</u> perspective to understanding the appeal of the romance novel, a perspective which can delve deeper and uncover unconscious, psychological interpretations which, in turn, can organize and make sense of the "surface" explications.

Jensen (1984) in her study recognizes the need for psychological perspectives and calls for more psychological studies which can shed light on the romance novel phenomenon. (p. 160) Mussell (1981) believes genuine theoretical scholarship on women's romantic fiction will come of age only through a synthesis of three approaches which include not only "data compiled by librarians and booksellers and pollsters, in historical context" and "the aesthetic experience that occurs between reader and book" but also "insights of psychologists concerned with male/female differences in development and role formation, placed in the context of socialization." (p. 98)

Radway (1984 a,b) also recognizes the importance of psychological investigatio

demonstrated by her reliance on Nancy Chodorow's The Reproduction of Mothering to support her claims that the romance reader has unmet, psychological needs for nurturance which are met by the romance reading experience. While Radway's reader-response approach focuses on the readers as agents of meaning, through actual discussions with the Smithton Readers and reference to texts as support for the readers' claims, this paper will examine the romance novel text, focusing on character traits and narrative structure. I will argue that while claims for nurturance needs are valid, these cravings for nurturance are only a "symptom," or partial manifestation, of a larger psychological drive working in the romance novel fan--her quest for and reaffirmation of SELF.

II

Radway's inquiry (1984 b) into the romance novel deserves recognition and elaboration, not only for its importance to this study but also to any study similarly exploring this popular culture phenomenon. Her work has "legitimized" the scholarly study of a popular culture document that many social and literary critics have dismissed as "escape intertainment" or "inferior works of literature." Her unprejudiced, straightforward attempt to get at a genuine understanding of how and why the romance novel appeals to the contemporary woman reader is to be applauded.

My purpose in the remaining three sections is to describe the three stages that the female reader passes through on her way to gaining self-identity and at the same time, to critique the major assertions

Radway makes in support of her finding that romance reading is "a ritual wish to be cared for, loved, and validated in a particular way." (1984 b, p. 83) I will use a "Jungian" reading to support my claims, utilizing the animus/anima archetype, in order to demonstrate that Radway's conclusions of pursuit of vicarious nurturance may be more accurately described as only one piece of a larger "whole," which is the greater need of finding self-identity. This initial stage in the quest for "self" I term "separation" because it represents the romance reader's recognition at the outset of the novel that the heroine and hero possess radically opposing characteristics.

One of Radway's (1984 b) major concerns is to delineate the characteristics of the heroine and demonstrate how these qualities make the heroine attractive to the reader. In their written questionnaires and oral comments the Smithton Readers observed that their favorite heroines have unusual intelligence, an extra-ordinary fiery disposition, good sense of humor, and special abilities. (Radway, 1984 b, pp. 77, 101, 123) In the character of the heroine the readers see themselves as they wish they could be: desirable, independent, and not afraid to resist a man. (Radway, 1984 a). I would argue, however, that the "spunk" of the heroine has a deeper psychological significance than Radway's claim to vicarious identification. While I agree that, on the discursive level, the reader takes pleasure in the heroine as the embodiment of traits she is unable to project in her own patriarchal surroundings, at a deeper, unconscious level the heroine represents the "ideal woman" who importantly functions as the feminine model which "awaits" the animus complement.

Harding (1933) provides a description of how a woman needs both, to live the feminine life inherently hers and to project her animus tendencies as a way of achieving self-identity and of functioning successfully in society.

> Life in relation to her man and to society is fulfilled for her in the living of her feminine functions. She lives as woman. But, if she is to become an independent personality, instead of being only the feminine counterpart of a man, she must bring up to consciousness her own masculine qualities... She is able to take a place in the world of affairs only through the exercise of these masculine qualities.
>
> (p. 78)

Although Harding (1933) is proposing that this animus projection must occur in a woman's social interactions, this projection is, in effect, able to be achieved by the female reader as she reads and experiences the romance novel. Even though Harding's words are meant to apply to social relationships, I would argue that the unconscious transference typifies how the romance reader "constructs" the hero and heroine:

> She projects onto him [hero] some important element from her unconscious and then is attracted, or repelled, by that which she sees in him, quite unaware that it has originated deep within her own psyche. It is her masculine soul, her animus, which she has projected...her animus projected to the outside world draws her irresistably...From her subjective point of view, it seems to her that she is attracted from without, while in reality the thing which attracts her is from within--in her unconscious.
>
> (p. 41)

Her attraction to the heroine becomes her identification with the ideal woman (possessing traits desirable for competition in today's patriarchal

society); her attraction to the hero becomes the projection of her animus spirit. Together, both transferences are necessary in the initial stage of the pursuit of self-identity.

Harding (1933) explains this growth toward self, "When a woman first brings her masculine qualities up into consciousness, she lives through a stage of identification with this side of her personality." (p. 81) Further, again in terms of social relationships, successful transference allows her to relate effectively with a man, "She can release herself from the dominance of her animus if she can work through the transference element in her love and make a real relationship with him." (Harding, 1933, p. 68) Therefore, the function of hero becomes the psychological transference necessary for identifying with her"masculine" side and thus attaining a deeper sense of self.

We need to explore in greater detail the characteristics of both heroine and hero so that their intriguing relationship can be better appreciated. Even though the early pages of the romance novel might seem to picture the heroine as vulnerable, defenseless, and at the mercy of someone else, she always possesses hidden strength which she can call up when needed. There is always a sense that the heroine possesses underlying courage, and although at times she may be in dire straits, she can always rise above adversity.

Lowery's How to Write Romance Novels That Sell (1983), a handbook/ guide for how to write a romance novel, describes universal characteristics required of the typical heroine: "Despite her defenselessness, the heroine

has an indomitable spirit...The heroine is always spunky. Events that would leave the rest of us limp never cause her to be sorry for herself. This nonsentimental, direct approach to life is appealing to the reader. No matter how weak the heroine may appear on the surface, underneath she is persevering and courageous." (p. 28) Another guidebook Writing Romance Fiction for Love and Money (1983) says, "The [heroine] must be believable as a woman of the 1980's, one who can solve her own problems, one who is attempting to find a satisfying life." (Burack, 1983, pp. 81-82) Jensen (1984) agrees that "This spirited strength is portrayed to be an inherent part of the heroine's character, an aspect that cannot be taken away from her by adversity, prosperity, or even by love. (p. 123)

Representative examples drawn from the romance texts confirm the ideal heroine's characteristics. In Celeste DeBlasis' popular romance The Proud Breed (1985) (a book repeatedly referred to by Radway and the Smithton Readers as a favorite romance novel) Tessa is portrayed as a young, vulnerable girl whose father is a drunk and cannot support her; she is being forced to marry an abusive, domineering man. Yet she wears a knife and when a stranger (Gavin, future hero) sees her bathing in a pool and tries to rape her, she violently stabs him, nearly killing him. (p. 13) Another favorite romance author Woodiwiss, in her landmark novel The Flame and the Flower, (1972) creates another vulnerable heroine, Heather, who is being raised by sadistic stepparents who get rid of her by sending her off to another town with her uncle William,to be a prostitute. When this uncle tries to rape her, she lashes out and stabs him. (p. 28)

That the heroine is basically independent to begin with is in contrast to the hero whose personality changes between the onset of the story and the ending. It is crucial to this study to note in analyzing the hero that, unlike the heroine whose resolve and independence are characteristics she possesses throughout her life, the hero is initially harsh and uncaring, but in the process of the story, he is transformed into a warm, nurturing individual.

From the same Woodiwiss novel, we have a description of the hero's "darkness" and brutality, "He had the look of a pirate about him, or even Satan himself, with his dark, curly hair and long sideburns that accentuated the lean, handsome features of his face." (p. 31) And in his first meeting with the heroine, his cruelty and ruthlessness are described as he mistakes Heather for a prostitute and proceeds to rape her, "Almost immediately he was on top of her, pinning down her writhing body, and it seemed that every move she made only abetted his intent... 'No!' she gasped, 'Leave me alone! Let me be!' He chuckled and murmured against her throat. 'Oh, no, my bloodthirsty little wench. Oh no, not now.'" (p. 33) In the Harlequin Romance A Time of Deception (1985) the hero, a "domineering, pigheated brute," meets the heroine for the first time: "His arm lashed out and she felt hard fingers digging cruelly into her wrist. 'When I first saw you sitting in my father's office, I vowed I would have you.'" (Badger, 1985, p. 34) These excerpts are typical of how heroes, at the beginning of the novels, are portrayed as abusive, domineering characters.

One explanation for the appearance of harsh, impatient heroes certainly must be that the hero has to match the recent trend in "spunky" and "feisty" heroines. Jensen (1984) recognizes the trend of the 1980's romance novel, "Flamboyant heroes are paired with tempermental, spirited heroines.When the heroines began to change into stronger characters, the heroes had to change as well. As one reader pointed out to me, strong-willed women intimidate most men. To make the story believable, heroes had to at least match the heroines in strength." (p. 90) This explanation of why the traits of the heroine and hero have changed represents largely a "surface" interpretation, however. My argument for a deeper, Jungian reading can make sense of the discursive characterizations. The "strengthening" and "intensifying" that heroes and heroines have undergone can be explained by the current women's movement which has called attention to our patriarchal society and the unequal treatment women endure today. The current questioning of a woman's place in our patriarchal society and the consequent need for women to find their identity within the workplace and within the home can more accurately explain why the heroines have become stronger and more independent and why the heroes have been likewise created to match them.

The ideal romance succeeds, therefore, because differences between the two prime actors are carefully drawn at the outset and always the same--a spunky heroine who is resourceful throughout and an initially cruel hero who is transformed into a caring individual. The stability of the heroine is understood as the ideal woman figure and contrasts with the hero who, as the animus projection, changes from brutal to

caring--as he is "faced" and then assimilated to the female function. The next section will examine this developing relationship between the hero and heroine. The most striking characteristic of the ideal romance becomes, therefore, its resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between the heroine and hero. (Radway, 1984 b, p. 122)

III

The "identification" stage represents how the hero and heroine interact as they progress to the "point of merger"--that point where at the discursive level, the hero and heroine recognize their true love for each other, and at the unconscious level, they enact the final merging of contra-sexual tendencies. In order to bring out the parallelisms and causal relations between the psychological needs of the reader and the fulfillment contained in the narrative structure, I want to examine this larger topic of the developing relationship by focusing on the narrative structures of misunderstandings, transformation of the hero, sexual harassment, and happy ending.

Because the romance narrative is compelled to focus on the relationship between the hero and heroine, because the hero at the outset must act (according to the romance formula) in an uncaring, abusive manner, and because the romance formula dictates a happy ending, the middle of the romance narrative is obliged to create conflict and sustain tension between the two main characters until they reach the final climactic resolution. Typically, romance novelists settle for creating misunderstandings between hero and heroine as the main source of plot tension. Suspicion and distrust,

triggered by the initial "conflict-encounter," is sustained because the inner dialogue of each character is constantly assigning false signifieds to the other's actions. (Radway, 1984b, p. 65) Lack of honest communication between the two is the major obstacle to their mutual understanding. (Jensen, 1984, p. 76) In fact, in most novels the basic conflict/misunderstanding which sustains the whole plot tension could be resolved by one character saying aloud in one sentence what he/she is thinking. However, they both maintian silent signification, although because the story is told from the heroine's viewpoint, we get a steadier stream of her attributions of false signifieds than the hero's.

In the Harlequin Romance Maelstrom (1985) Samatha sees a "dark" man and later, when they "accidentally" collide in a restaurant, she thinks he has been watching her and planning this excuse to approach her. She immediately distrusts his motives, especially when he "holds her against him for support several seconds longer than was necessary." (Cooper, 1985, p. 15) She thinks, "She had met his type before--and how! They thought they were God's gift to women...there was a dangerous light in his eyes that spoke of more than anger." (pp. 15-16) Later in the story, having become romantically involved, while sharing an intimate sunset, he is interrupted by a phone call from a woman and then seems upset; to this simple action, she assigns his complete rejection of her. (p. 108) Only at the very end, are their real feelings exposed.

At the discursive level the structure of initial cruelty is needed to trigger the misunderstandings and point up the eventual triumph of the heroine. Throughout, the hero and heroine are shown to despise

each other overtly, even though they are "in love," primarily because each is jealous or suspicious of the other's motives and consequently fails to trust the other. (Radway, 1984 b, p. 65)

Radway assigns to the heroine's principal activity throughout the book, "the mental process of trying to assign particular signifieds to his overt acts." (1984 b, p. 139) To this process she assigns the unconscious need of women (who live in a patriarchal society) to uncover the motives of men and thereby better understand them, "In effect, what she [heroine] is trying to do in discovering the significance of his behavior by uncovering his motives is to understand what the fact of male presence and attention means for her, a woman." (Radway, 1984 b, p. 139)

Although I agree that the reader might be unconsciously trying to understand male motives as she vicariously experiences the heroine's desire to understand the hero's motives, I would argue for the larger, more fundamental force moving her to "construct" the heroine's actions--her need to define a self-identity. Radway's suggestion that a woman wants to understand a man's relation to her only hints at the greater need for self-identity. Utilizing once again Jung's archetype, we see that the misunderstandings (false signifieds) have deep and surface functions. They serve not only to differentiate the heroine/ideal woman from the hero/animus projection until they can be merged, but they also allow time and occasions for the heroine to demonstrate her independence and self-assurance and the hero to become transformed.

The consideration of hero transformation as narrative structure

builds on this literary device of misunderstandings. Radway's contention is that although the hero appears to become gentle and understanding, what is really happening is that the heroine merely learns to understand him. In other words, Radway suggests that the hero is "transformed" only because the heroine (and the reader through the heroine) now understands the hero. (1984 b, p. 216) She elaborates by suggesting, "The romance inadvertantly tells its reader, then, that she will receive the kind of care she desires only if she can find a man who is already tender and nurturant." (p. 147) Radway views the formal attachment to the hero at the end of the narrative as more a "capitulation or surrender to uncontrollable sexuality than a triumph effected by her ability to transform him into an emotionally expressive individual." (1984 b, p. 171)

Contradictions in Radway's claims and findings can be noted here. Her major claim is that the romance reader "constructs" romances as a means to fulfill a psychological need for nurturance and that the reader interprets the conversion of the hero to gentleness as a case of female triumph. But as noted above, she also wants to view the romance reading experience, in actuality, as a confirmation to the female reader that a woman can only succeed with a man if she is lucky enough to find a man already nurturant and that the final joining of the hero and heroine is her sexual and emotional surrender to him. In her book, then, this apparent contradiction appears--on the one hand, at the deeper psychological level the reader enjoys the books as female triumph but on the other hand, the books are merely confirming her disadvantaged position in a patriarchal

society. In both these cases, the hero, or men in general, do not really change; instead, the heroine is called on to re-interpret the male's behavior.

However, in an article written after her book, "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading," (1984a) she views the hero as really being changed by the heroine. She contradicts the previous notion and admits that the heroine might be acting as an agent of change, "In the course of the story, however, he learns the value of [sensitivity and tender gestures] because he almost loses the heroine. In a sense, then, he is converted by the heroine into an occupant and proponent of the female world of love and emotional commitment." (1984a)

My Jungian reading can make sense of these inconsistencies. I would argue that at the conscious level the female reader "reads" that the hero is changed by the heroine. The heroine, through her spunk and resolve, acts as the agent of change because she causes the hero to recognize her as an independent, valuable person, worthy of love, and he, in turn, becomes caring and nurturing to her. The reader's pleasure in the text is her identification with the heroine's triumph; in fact, the novel's emphasis on his physical power and strength makes her transformation of him even more spectacular.

At the unconscious level, the notion of who might be changing whom or who is understanding whom is not as important as the process of the merging of the animus figure. The romance reader's interpretation of hero transformation is vital to her need for gaining a sense of "self."

Facing her masculine tendencies and assimilating this to her feminine "side" is accomplished as she experiences the transformation of the hero and the happy ending.

My approach based on Jung's tenets can clear up other inconsistencies which Radway herself admits she cannot explain. Radway questions (1984 b) why "No action on the part of the hero or, for that matter, on any part of any other character can be said to cause or explain the magic transformation of his cruelty and indifference into tender care. The abrupt transformation simply takes place...The only clue to possible shift is earlier descriptions of hero which hint at his softness." (1984 b, pp. 147-148.) Understanding the functions of the main characters as sexual and contra-sexual tendincies allows us to understand why the hero must be transformed--whether the narrative devices make it look motivated or not. In other words, if we view the romance reading experience as a three-step process toward gaining a sense of "self," the hero, as animus figure, must transformed and assimilated to "gentleness" in order for the masculine and feminine counterparts to be joined and a real "self" accomplished.

Recognizing contra-sexual functions in the text also answers those critics who contend that a romance reader enjoys the narrative structure of hero dominating heroine because the woman reader craves male domination. Jensen's (1984) comments are representative of many critics who ask why heroines, instead of fighting male mastery, are thrilled by it and want the heroes to dominate their sexual relationships. (p. 114)

> [In describing a particular heroine Flair]...She continues to deal with the explosive sexual tension, continues to be exposed to his advances and his verbal abuse of her--until they both admit that they really love each other. This abrupt turnabout, which the reader can anticipate because she knows that romances have a "happy ending," denies the seriousness of the sexual harassment that preceded the declaration of love. It was all just a silly lovers' game that is simply resolved by a little communication.
>
> (p. 108)

Mussell (1981) quotes Martha Nelson[5] who agrees with the romance message that sexual harassment is acceptable, "The fantasy confirms a familiar and insidious message: the guy you think is hurting you is really the one who loves you the most. This mingling of pain and love, of humiliation and rapture, is a key element in all romance fiction, reinforcing the notion that women are by nature masochistic." (p. 20)

Radway (1984b) shares another pessimistic view of the "necessity" of sexual harassment by pointing out that facing male brutality in a romance text "allows women readers to understand the meaning of an event that has become almost unavoidable in the real world. The romance may express misogynistic attitudes not because women share them but because they increasingly need to know how to deal with them." (p. 72)
In addition to the claim that the romance text allows women to face male brutality, Radway would also agree with Jensen and Mussell that the romance novel teaches that women accept, and even enjoy, sexual harassment and that women are destined to accept masculine dominance because of their prescribed social roles of lover, wife, and mother:

> Women in romances...are fated to live out a pre-determined existence. The existence is circumscribed by a narrative structure that demonstrates that despite idiosyncratic histories, all women inevitably end up associating their female identity with the social roles of lover, wife, and mother. Even more successfully than the patriarchal society within which it was born, the romance denies women the possiblity of refusing that purely relational destiny and thus rejects their right to a single, self-contained existence.
>
> (1984 b, p. 207)

Before we can examine these commonly-held, seemingly-feasible explanations for the place of sexual harassment in the romance text, we have to return to a question previously-asked in this paper--why would a woman reader be drawn to a text and a reading experience which portray female submission and defeat? Romance critics who take literally these surface meanings just presented, which, indeed, portray a woman submitting to male dominance and sexual harassment even in the "happy" ending, cannot account for the fascination romance readers have for this kind of literature and the compulsion with which they are drawn to it.

I would argue that, on the contrary, the romance reader is attracted to romances simply because they <u>do</u> present a sense of self-identity for the reader. Contrary to Radway's claim that the romance novel "rejects [a woman's] right to a single, self-contained existence," (1984 b, p. 207) I would suggest that understanding the hero and heroine's relationship as an unconscious facing of and merging of both "sides" of the reader's personality would explain why, indeed, the reading of a romance is actually an extremely <u>pleasurable</u> experience because it gives a sense of self-realization and even self-actualization. In other words, even though the text's surface descriptions and events portray negative

or abusive treatment of a woman (the heroine), these negative actions work at the unconscious level in a positive, reassuring sense in the quest for self.

The narrative structure of happy ending is invariably found in the ideal romance novel. Just as reading formula fiction is a repose from reality because we can always count on the "formula," so also does the certainty of a happy ending function at a deeper llvel. As suggested many times already, the happy ending between hero and heroine seals the final merging of the animus spirit to the female complement.

Radway's (1984 b) reading of the romance novel ending is consistent with the negative interpretations she assigns to the other narrative devices of the romance text:

> When the mythic ending of the romance undercuts the realism of its novelistic rendering of an individual woman's story, this literary form reaffirms its founding culture's belief that women are valuable not for their unique personal qualities but for their biological sameness and their ability to perform that essential role of maintaining and reconstituting others.
>
> (p. 217.)

It bears repeating to ask, if a woman reader <u>really</u> experiences the defeat, exploitation, and male domination that critics allege are portrayed in the romance novel, why does she continue to be drawn to these texts? I would argue that it is not because the woman reader exorcises her fear of rape or feelings of submission through the reading of these things happening to another woman in a romance text. I would argue, instead, that real satisfaction is gained because the reading experience, in the

facing and merging of ideal woman and animus figures, is an enjoyable and satisfying pursuit of self. Recognizing that positive benefits are derived through the fulfillment of psychological needs better explains why women are "hooked" on these books. It may seem as if the fantasy ending "magically solves problems" (Jensen, 1984, p. 152) on a discursive level, but at the deeper, unconscious level real satisfaction is felt by the reader.

IV

The final stage in the pursuit of self is the "assimilation" stage in which the accomplished merger of animus to feminine function signifies the final and full realization of self. The successful assimilation of the animus projection to the female function also corresponds to the finding of the "lost mother."

The journey toward self and toward the finding of the lost mother is presented the same way in all ideal romance novels. The heroine at the beginning of the narrative is always on strange turf. Unlike the hero who is usually in a setting familiar to him, the heroine is virtually always in a new settings, beginning a new job or having had to move to a new town, etc. This situation makes the hero appear powerful, especially in relation to the heroine who, set down in an unknown environment, is vulnerable. (Jensen,1984, p. 87)

This feeling of emptiness or loss of identity is what sends the woman reader to a romance novel. As Radway (1984 b) points out, "The boyish independence of the typical heroine can be reinterpreted..as a symbolic

representation of the initial step of a young girl's journey toward individuation and subsequent connection." (p. 138)

So, the feeling of loss, of terror of the unknown, of non-identity that the heroine always finds herself in at the beginning of the romance narrative is the same feeling of loss or uncertainty of social position that a reader might be feeling in her patriarchal society.

The reader identifies at the discursive level, therefore, with the heroine and the heroine's uncertain social position. (Jensen, 1984, p. 87; Radway, 1984 b, p. 138) But as we have noted earlier, the "spunk" and resourcefulness of the heroine also makes her a powerful psychological figure of attraction for the reader. Because the character of heroine possesses all those desirable, aggressive traits that the woman reader would like to possess but finds difficult to enact in a patriarchy, the heroine serves as the ideal model of womanhood. The reader's identification with the heroine becomes at this level an identification with the ideal figure of womanhood which is the symbolic "mother." The "mother" is the collective, ideal woman that all women desire to be. A woman reading a romance novel seeks her mother in the heroine. (Pearson, 1981)

But curiously, a woman cannot have a reconciliation with her "mother" (or find the powerful woman within her) until she faces her masculine tendencies and transforms them to her feminine side. As Harding (1933) says, "If she is to become an independent personality, instead of being only the feminine counterpart of a man, she must bring up to consciousness her own masculine qualities...She is able to take a place in the world of

affairs only through the exercise of these masculine qualities." (p. 78) Just as the hero changes from uncaring to caring in a romance text, a woman in her social relations who faces her masculine tendencies and recognizes this side of her own personality, is released to be a freer, more secure person. The discovery of a woman of the positive mother within her is not possible until she faces and accepts her animus spirit. Harding (1933) explains this process:

> Reality can gradually be made to replace the illusion of the animus and anima projections, a process which involves psychological development and an extension of consciousness through the assimilation of that unconscious side of the psyche which previously lived in the projected animus or anima.
>
> (p. 38)

In other words, a woman facing her animus projection is able to release it from her unconscious and make it part of her conscious realm. And in so doing, she realizes her full potential as woman and "self." Pearson (1981) agrees that a woman "following her liberation from male definition" becomes ready for "reconciliation with the mother" which ultimately leads to finding self-identity, "The search for mother and the search for self are inextricably bound together (p. 197)..The hero's [woman's] reconciliation with the mother results in the act of giving birth to the whole self--a reconciliation of self-affirmation with nurturance and self with Other." (p. 199) I would argue, then that a romance reader faces the powerful animus figure within her as she "constructs" the hero of the text. By freeing herself from the animus projection as she experiences the transformation of the hero to "feminine" qualities, then and only then, is she able to reconcile to the ideal,

symbolic mother within her. As Pearson (1981) says, "Having discovered the powerful father within herself, she reconsiders her original repudiation of the mother. Her quest becomes a search for her true, powerful female parent. (p. 177)

We should not leave this study without recognizing that men, as well, project an anima "side" and that they can also enjoy reconciliation with their feminine projection. Pearson (1981) notes that, "In many cases, [in literature] a male protagonist gives birth to a new self only when he stops repressing his buried female characteristics." (p. 266) Research into male-oriented popular literature could reveal if, in fact, this projection and assimilation of anima figures is also accomplished.

Let me conclude this study by stating that, in fairness to her findings, Radway (1984 b) does acknowledge that the romance reading experience is in some respects a woman's quest for self-identity. She contends that "a woman reader, in her 'construction' of the heroine, manages to acquire a sense of 'self-in-relation,' or a sense of self that is nevertheless measured by its relationship to a man:

> The heroine's search for her identity dovetails rather quickly with the tale of her developing relationship to the hero. Chodorow's theories are especially useful in explaining the psychological import of the stories' confluence. What the heroine successfully establishes by the end of the ideal narrative is the now-familiar female self, the self-in-relation.
>
> (p. 139)

I would respond to Radway's use of Chodorow's theory of nurturance as explanation of the romance "message"--that women have an identity only through a man and that the romance text portrays the difficulties of

relating to a man--by saying that my study's use of the psychological perspective of Jung can provide a more insightful explanation as to what is "going on" when a woman reads a romance novel. In fact, it would answer Radway's dilemma of wanting to claim that the discursive "text" of the romance novel denigrates women yet having to acknowledge that the woman reader is absolutely "hooked" on these books.

> Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that this group finds it possible to select and construct romances in such a way that their stories are experienced as a reversal of the oppression and emotional abandonment suffered by women in real life. For Dot and her customers [the Smithton Readers] , romances provide a utopian vision in which female individuality and a sense of self are shown to be compatible with nurturance and care by another.
>
> (1984 b, p. 55)

Radway's findings that romances provide a sense of individuality and a sense of self which is compatible with nurturance cannot be explained by her use of Chodorow. Her finding that romance novels satisfy a need for nurturance is only part of the puzzle of the real function of romance novels. Utilizing Jung's archetype of animus/anima, it is possible to explain why the romance novel gives a sense of self yet allows a woman to be nurturing. Assimilating the animus allows a woman to find her "self" and therefore gain individuality; finding the lost mother allows a person to be nurturant and therefore be caring toward others. Pearson (1981) notes these coinciding phenomena, "The discovery of the positive mother within and the simultaneous emergence of the nurturing, heroic self are frequently described metaphorically in feminist narratives as the act of giving birth." (p. 197) Romance novels succeed because both

the characterizations of hero and heroine and the narrative structures presented at the discursive level satisfy the unconscious needs of animus projection and permit a recognition of real SELF.

NOTES

[1] Some even place the romance novel's origins to Samuel Richardson's Pamela even though its plot, Pamela's eventual acceptance of male domination, does not typify the usual independent, self-identity themes found in romance novels.

[2] By "construct" I mean the notion that a reader, in his/her reading of the text, not only understands the discursive, "objective" events being presented but attaches to the "textual events" other meanings which he/she brings to the text from all previous experiences. In other words, the notion of "construct" puts the "job" of interpretation on the reader.

[3] Most typical of this lascivious trend are books by Rosemary Rogers.

[4] This study is not prepared to claim that the so-called "bodice-ripping" trend caused the surge in popularity of romance novels or that the popularity of these novels caused the emergence of erotic romance novels. This "chicken/egg" argument is not so important to this study as noting that the emergence of erotic texts coincides with or signals the popularity explosion of the early 1970's. I will note later in this paper, however, that the erotic trend is a result of the real push in society for women's equality, emerging during the early 1970's.

[5] "Sweet Bondage: You and Your Romance Habit." Ms, Feb 1983, p. 97.

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